It can be challenging for parents and carers to know whether children are spending too much time on their devices. Furthermore, it's even more of a challenge to know whether a child is addicted to the internet and social media. As technology is becoming more pervasive, children and young people are experiencing tech-related dependencies. Do we as parents and carers have the knowledge to identify and support children and young people who may be developing an addiction to their devices?

**What parents need to know about SCREEN ADDICTION**

**SMARTPHONE ADDICTION IS A RECOGNISED HEALTH CONDITION**

Children as young as 13 are attending 'smartphone rehab' following growing concerns over screen time. There are now help centers in the UK which deal with screen addiction for children and adults showing the seriousness of device addiction.

**IT CAN CAUSE SLEEP DEPRIVATION**

7 out of 10 children said they had missed sleep because of their smartphones. 80% of the children said they had neglected their school work as a result. It is important that children get the sleep they need in order to focus the next day.

**CONFIDENCE, SUPPORT & ACCEPTANCE**

The Children’s Commissioner report ‘Life in Likes’, explored how children aged 8-11 are using social media today. It showed that children are using their devices to speak to their online friends about their problems and seek acceptance and support, removing face to face interactions.

**LOSS OF INTEREST IN OTHER THINGS**

Your child may become less interested in anything that does not include their device. You may notice that your child is missing school time and generally being less engaged with other activities in the home. It is important to discuss this with your child as soon as you notice a behaviour change.

**APPs CAN BE ADDICTIVE**

Apps have been designed with ‘psychological tricks’ to constantly grab your attention. One example of this is on the app Snapchat, where you can gain 'streaks' when interacting with your friends. This addictive nature of apps aims to engage children and keep them coming back for more.

**LIMIT SCREEN TIME**

In today’s digital age, technology is an important part of a child's development. However, having access to their device will mean they are missing out on a lot of screen time. Rather than banning them from using their devices, we suggest setting a screen time limit. Work out what you think is a suitable and healthy amount of time for your child to be on their device per week. Remember that your child may need to use devices for their school homework so only set screen limits for non-school time. Once you have established this, have the conversation with them to discuss why you are implementing a screen time limit. There will be others in your child’s friendship group who will not have screen limits set and will be sending messages when they do not have access to their phones.

**ENCOURAGE ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES**

It may seem like an obvious solution, but encouraging children to play with their friends, read a book, or playing outdoors will help them realise how much fun they can have without their devices. Playing football, trampolining, camping, going for a walk are all healthy replacements for screen time. Try to join them in their outdoor activities to show your support.

**LEAD BY EXAMPLE**

Children model their behavior on their peers, so if their parents are constantly on their device, they will see this as acceptable. Try limiting your own screen time and follow the same rules you have set for them. If you have asked your child to not use their device at the table, make sure you don’t. Try setting house rules that the whole family abide by.

**MOBILE-FREE MEAL TIMES**

Have you tried to settle your child by giving them a tablet at the dinner table or restaurant? This may seem like a quick fix to calm them down but in reality, it is encouraging them to use their device as a distraction from conversation and dealing with their emotions. We suggest removing all technology from the dinner table and having conversations with your family about how their day has been.

**REMOVE DEVICES FROM THEIR BEDROOM**

Setting a rule about removing devices from bedrooms will help your child to get the sleep they need and be more focused the next day at school. 20% of teenagers said that they wake up to check their social network accounts on their devices. Even by having a device switched off in their bedroom, they may be tempted to check for notifications.

**LESS TIME MEANS LESS EXPOSURE**

There are many risks associated with devices, such as cyberbullying, grooming, inappropriate content etc. Less time spent on a screen means that a child will be less exposed to these risks.

**Sources**

http://uk.businessinsider.com/how-app-developers-keep-us-addicted-to-our-smartphones


Journal of Youth Studies: https://www.mirror.co.uk/tech/one-five-kids-losing-sleep-9653986

http://uk.businessinsider.com/how-app-developers-keep-us-addicted-to-our-smartphones


https://www.independent.co.uk

www.nationalonlinesafety.com

© National Online Safety Ltd

This is a joint definitive guide. Please check with the app’s support information to see if your security and privacy concerns are addressed.